
PHOTOTHERAPY

What is phototherapy?

Phototherapy, or light therapy, involves shining a specific wavelength of ultraviolet (UV) light under medical supervision to treat various skin conditions. The UV light spectrum is divided into UVA (320-400 nm), UVB (280-320 nm) and UVC (200-280 nm). We typically use a narrow portion of UVB (311-313 nm) called narrow-band UVB to treat the skin, although sometimes UVA light is also used.

What is treated with phototherapy?

Common skin conditions treated with phototherapy are atopic dermatitis, psoriasis, prurigo nodularis, vitiligo, mycosis fungoides, pityriasis lichenoides chronica and others.

How does phototherapy work?

Ultraviolet light is able to modify the skin's immune system and calm it down. By doing this, it can slow down skin cells that are growing too fast, it can calm down an overactive immune system and control itching. All of this can help the skin heal.

What happens when I go for phototherapy?

During your visit, you will be in a private room where you can undress and stand in a large box with special lightbulbs, wearing your underwear and special goggles to protect your eyes.

The first time you are in the light box will be for a short time, but each visit will be a bit longer. The goal is to get a faint amount of redness without burning .

Each phototherapy appointment usually lasts about 15 minutes. You need a break of at least 24 hours before you can have another session. Most of the time, you are asked to come in 3 times a week and this can be taken down to 1 or 2 times a week if your skin is getting much better.

It usually takes about 2-3 months before you start seeing improvement.

What do I do about my other medications?

Most medications can be continued and these include most topical creams and ointments. However, for each session, you should have clean skin, free of medications, lotions, oils, and perfumes as these can make your skin more sensitive to the light.

However, there are some medications that can make your skin more sensitive to the light. Always let your nurse/ doctors know all medications, herbs and supplements you are taking.

What do I do after a phototherapy session?

To get less skin irritation after phototherapy, we suggest using a mild cleanser when you bathe or shower and to apply a moisturizer on your skin, especially after you clean your skin. It's also important to be careful in the sun and to use sun protection for your skin when you are outdoors.

What are some side-effects of phototherapy?

A little bit of skin redness is expected and shows that you are getting a good dose of phototherapy. However, you should not burn.

Here are some signs of burning: moderate to severe redness, pain, tightness, itching and rarely blistering of the skin. This usually becomes noticeable 4-6 hours after the phototherapy session. If this happens, please let us know. Over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream can be used for the itching.

Other side effects include premature skin aging and tanning. Since this is a narrow band of the UV spectrum, there is no increased risk of skin cancer (unlike tanning beds, which have an increased risk of skin cancer, since there is a broad band of the UV spectrum used).

